

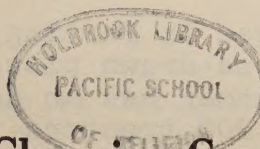
"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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The Effective Church and The Changing Countryside

By Benjamin H. Cain*

Someone recently declared, "The only permanent thing we have left is change." Our society is dynamic and changes are a valid part of it. There can be no solid and constructive growth in any social order without change. We have experienced many amazing and yet purposeful changes in our economy during the last few decades. For the most part they have brought culture and economic enrichment to our people. We enjoy many blessings because of them. Scientists tell us there have been more changes in agriculture during the last fifty years than since Old Testament times. We shall refer to some of them and partially interpret some of them on this paper.

THE NEW COUNTRYSIDE

Changes can be evaluated quite profitably over a period from thirty to fifty years. Like a pebble thrown into the water which starts many ripples, one change will produce a succession of changes that may be far reaching with cumulative results. May I note just a few of the more significant changes from the viewpoint of a rural churchman:

The Farm Home:

There are some 16,000,000 rural homes in America. Through rural electrification, the old kerosene lamp has been replaced by electric light in nearly 90 percent of them. The use of electricity since the turn of the Century has increased almost 6,000 percent in

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in the U. S. A. With electricity came many labor-saving devices and a wide assortment of gadgets has been produced to add to the comforts and conveniences of the farm home. Modern and attractive farm homes adorn and add something to a countryside that is already beautiful.

Mechanization of Agriculture:

Changes in farming have been revolutionary and far-reaching. The horse-drawn plows have been entirely outmoded. In their places the farmer has an assortment of larger implements drawn by nearly 4,000,000 tractors, which can operate day and night whenever needed. When the self-binder replaced the cradle, farmers felt that the last step in progress was made in the harvesting of grain. As of last year, there were 712,000 combines, many with straw balers attached, garnering our harvests. The nation now has 710,000 three-unit milking machines at work in its dairies. To these conveniences have been added the still more modern milking parlor. The small 'husking peg' and 'hook' that were carried in overall or jacket pockets, is more or less of a relic today, while 410,000 corn pickers gather our corn. A field of large acreage can be harvested in a single day. In 1930, we had 19,000,000 horses and mules on our farms. Today, we have left only about 7,500,000 of these animals scattered throughout the United States. With this large scale mechanization of agriculture, some farmers are said to be able to perform the labor required to produce a bushel of grain in one minute of time.

Transportation and Communication:

New systems ignore long distance. Only on rare occasions does one see a horse-drawn vehicle on the highways. These are the property of groups within our society who have more or less refused change. Many farm homes have from one to three automobiles. The horse-drawn wagon with its peculiar rattle and slow movement has been replaced on the highways by 2, 100, 000 fast-moving trucks that haul almost anything that can be loaded. There are now more than 50,000,000 telephones and 30,000,000 television sets in the nation. Some farmers have their own private planes for social and business pursuits. Very few farmers are over one hour from a large city.

Population Changes:

Rural and urban population have been practically reversed percentage-wise during the period we are considering. We now have 63 percent urban population and 37 percent rural. Of the latter number, at least 20 percent is non-farm. These people live in the country, but most of them have urban employment. The rural surplus population is feeding into the cities at the rate of 1,000,000

one is that many churches are demanding both dedicated and trained leadership, adequate buildings, and equipment, and a program of advance. Along with these must go adequate financial resources, a strong working force, a spirit of cooperation with other churches and the ever-enlarging community, and a schedule of activities, if the needs of the day will be met. The prophet Isaiah had the prophetic insight to see the present and coming opportunities of the church when he said, "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments." (Isaiah 52:1).

The Effective Rural Church:

The effective church is one that is bringing the force of a vital religious faith to bear on the constantly changing scene. She sees her task as preventing bad changes and making good ones, making it easy for people to go right instead of going wrong, making her influence felt in the new organizations and secular forces that surround her. When the church has properly adjusted to the age, rural people will respond to her challenge if it is large enough. Many churches are ineffective because they hold to the traditional past; their eyes and minds are closed to the present. They stand still while the rest of the world goes by. Society has a way of eliminating useless institutions and perpetuating useful ones. To serve is to live; not to serve means gradual, but certain death. A number of the smaller churches are seeing the advantages of cooperation and consolidation with other churches of their communion located nearby or, in special cases, with other denominations "for the Kingdom's sake." Such significant arrangements can mean better church plants, more adequate financial support, larger attendance, and a better trained minister. There are two words which we will be hearing more often: they are cooperation and consolidation. The road ahead may not be easy but we must **dedicate** ourselves to seeking God's will in these changing days.

People Need Changed Hearts:

In every age people need changed hearts. Science and technology have not given us what human nature really needs, - a changed heart, and life. They have given us no technique, no gadget no device, no machine or trick of magic that will change sinful heart to one that "loves God with all its soul, mind and strength." This is not the work of science. The formula of human redemption is of the church. In the midst of change, the formula of redemption is unchangeable: "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Salvation is in a Person. The church alone has "the word" and the "ministry" of reconciliation. She must say to all people in all lands, "Be ye reconciled to God."

The Church is the Redemptive Force in A Changing Community

The church is the instrument of God's purpose, to save persons and society. The church must reach into all the highways and byways, into all back roads, to farm owners, tenants, sharecroppers, migrants, with her message of love and salvation. She

The church is the mother of the public school system in America. We've climbed to our present heights of efficiency on the ladder of religion. Now, let us not kick that ladder from beneath us.

Religious Changes:

It is conceded by practically everyone that religion has not kept pace with science in our world. Religious changes therefore, must be labeled to a large degree the changes of NEGLECT. We still believe in God; but we do not act like we need Him; we just press a button. Science has the first and last word. It is no longer, "thus said the Lord". Our 1957 model altars are Size, Speed, Appearance, Success, and Wealth. Small wonder that numerous organizations and groups have started "Back to God", "Back to Christ", and "Back to the Bible" movements in our land! Such noble motives and purposes are beyond question. Personally, the writer feels that the title is not appropriate. It points in the wrong direction. God is not retreating. Christ has not run out of authority. The Bible has not been lost in the shuffle.

The Bible flatters no one. If one reads reverently and prayerfully, one soon discovers how far he is behind Christ in purity, love, prayer, forgiveness, sacrifice, sharing, race relations, world peace, and Christian service. God beckons us to lengthen our stride so as to get in step with Him in the march of progress. God's stream of time flows forward. We have not kept up with it. Bishop William Frazier McDowell said, "We will never need a new religion until someone lives a better life than the one lived by Jesus of Nazareth."

THE EFFECTIVE CHURCH

What is an effective church, and what is her task in these changing times? The church's first task has always been to "make new men" who, in turn, will make a new society, -- a new world, "wherein dwelleth righteousness". The change of human lives is a greater miracle in itself than anything the scientist has yet produced. But the church in its method and organization, must move ahead, in step with other developments.

The Church Must Accept the Fact of Change

She can neither refuse nor ignore the fact of change. The clocks of time cannot be turned backward. It is not the good old days for which some people long, but, rather, the grand new days that we should welcome and accept as a mighty challenge. By this we do not mean that the church must take on the physical gadgets of its secular environment. The church must adjust her attitude, program, and methods to the day in which we live and minister. The need for prophetic religious faith is increasingly urgent. This is not an easy task, but it must be done as a matter of survival and evangelical advance. Among the several good omens, I believe,

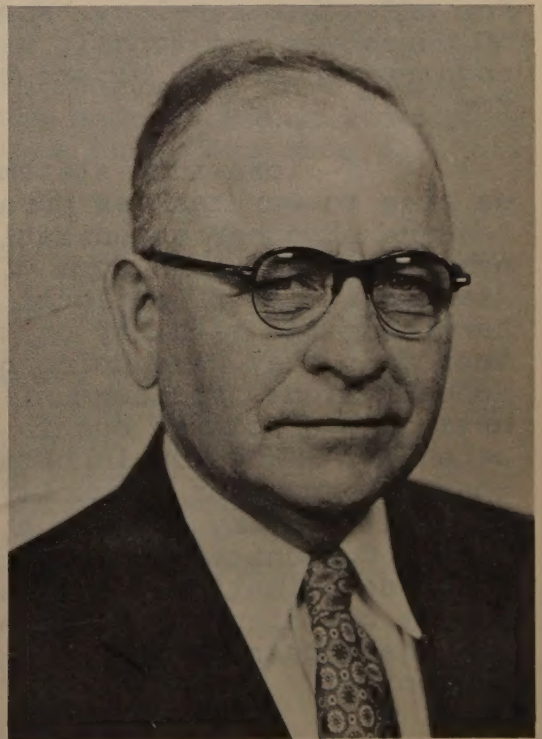
young people per year to replenish our industry, business and churches. To the urban church, this means increased membership through transfers and increased wealth and good leadership. To open country communities, it means that these same assets are being depleted. Mechanized agriculture is producing larger and fewer farms, and fewer farmers. Sons and daughters are forced to seek employment elsewhere. There is a two-way migration going on constantly, -- from the country to the city and from the city to the fringe areas. New communities are springing up by thousands and most of them are without the ministry and guidance of the Christian Church.

Changes in Scientific Development:

These changes, too, have been vast and far-reaching. Uncle Sam moved to the country in the thirties with new governmental programs. As a result, the farmer has an intimate acquaintance with his government; he no longer lives in an isolated valley; he has become a world citizen who sells in world markets. The farmer has new strains of stock and new crop varieties. He has new ways of treating the soil. As a rule, these are an asset to him and to agriculture in general. Scientific medicines, in the main, have replaced the patent medicines of "rubbing and smelling" kind. More thought is being given to rural health centers and hospitals. Yet, in many areas of the country, health is still poor and doctors are in great demand. Better sanitation methods and equipment are needed in many rural homes. Flies and rats still need to be recognized as enemies of health. Rats still destroy and defile as much as \$5,000,000 worth of food stuff annually.

Change in Educational System:

In this we have moved gradually, and then rapidly, from the little red schoolhouse into larger districts and territories. There is more consolidation on the way. This work is done on the state level; hence, over-all consolidation figures are hard to obtain. However, out of a Washington, D. C., office have come the consolidation statistics as of 1952. They read like a telegram and are as follows: "Seventy thousand consolidated schools in the U. S. A. are using 231,000 buses to transport 7,700,000 children a round trip distance of 5,500,000 miles per day." High school buildings and equipment today are far better than those of our colleges twenty-five years ago. The curricula have been enlarged and varied so as to suit the many educational interests of youth.



must not undertake this task alone; she has allies in the community who will help her carry out her program if she uses them wisely. They are the business and educational groups, professional men and women, civic organizations, farm organizations, and soil conservationists. Most of these are friends of the church. She will be wise if she works with and through them. A united approach must be made to the problems of the community if a favorable impact is to be made. When these forces join "hearts, hands, and resources", they become a vast channel of redemptive force in the community. It has well been said that the church must give to the community:

"A Motive that life cannot outgrow;
A Purpose that progress cannot outrun;
A Standard that success cannot cheapen;
A Goal that is no lower than the Kingdom of God;
A Power that suffices for all things."

OUR TASK:

The church leaders of our day have their tasks cut out for them. How can we develop effective churches out of some congregations that are static, discouraged, and declining? Largely, because of their ineffectiveness such congregations have been pushed to the sidelines: What is the way out of indifference and defeat? It takes a lot of spiritual vitality to be a constant and convincing witness for Jesus Christ and His Church these days of secularism and change. Our supreme need is a revival of vital religion. We have the field, the resources, the organization, and the program for effective service. What we need is a new spirit of re-dedication of ourselves and to help us with our task if the churches of the countryside are to become the dynamic spiritual force our world calls for.

I close this statement with an appeal to all pastors, that we give to our task as rural churchmen the same careful study that leaders of other organizations are giving. Almost every alert denomination has some form of a self-analysis schedule which may be used as a mirror for local churches. This is a good method for determining the vitality of the local church. We found some churches that felt they were doing quite well in serving their respective denominations, and communities were shocked when their apparent weaknesses were pointed out to them by a sincere use of the self-analysis schedule. However important it is for a church to know herself, she must know her community also. Before a well-defined program can be built for any church, a thorough community study is essential. Community survey cards are available at practically every denominational headquarters. We should use all materials at our disposal to make new churches out of old ones. We are the ambassadors of the changeless Christ to the changing community.

What greater challenge than to develop a rural church as a redemptive force adequate to the days of change in which we are living!